

STRENGTH FOR DEFENSE--ONE JOB OF  
THE FARM SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

The draft was a let-down to the breezy American who bragged that the United States was able to take care of itself.

Selectees filed into medical examination rooms. Out of every hundred, only 57 went on to military service. The rest were rejected as physically unfit. Poor diet was blamed for one-third of the rejections.

The Nation needed urgently the physical strength to build, manage and maintain a strong defense. Yet the people, judging from the draft records, were less than 60 percent fit.

Hunger-fighters hastened to their figures. With the physical record of the selectees as a magnifying glass they pointed again at what they had argued for years--that Americans were shamefully ill-nourished.

Forty-five million people--a third of the population--haven't been getting enough of the right kind of food. Some have bad eating habits, have money enough but not sense enough to buy the right foods. Most haven't even the money to get what they should eat.

With the focus of national attention on the need for better eating, the President called a country-wide nutrition conference. After measuring and discussing at high speed, the conferees wrote their answer. America must put three square meals a day on every table. Total defense called for total nutrition.

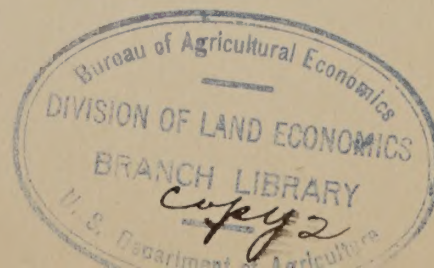
The task was set. The country looked to the farmers for the first step--production of plenty of health-giving foods. But farmers must be well fed themselves before they can produce food for democracy's defenders. That's where the Farm Security Administration's program began to pay defense dividends.

What Had Been Done

In 1936 nearly 1,700,000 farm families were trying to pay rent, operate their farms and feed and clothe themselves on about \$500 a year--less than \$10 a week. Such incomes couldn't be stretched far enough to provide a healthful living. Many families had to go on relief.

How thousands of these low-income farm families won their way to better food and better health and a role in defense of their homeland is a new chapter in the story of American agriculture.

Many of them had never heard of a "vitamin"--wouldn't have understood what it meant if they had. Most of them had never raised food for them-





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### What Was Done

In 1935 nearly 1,700,000 farm families were trying to pay rent, operate their farms and feed and clothe themselves on about \$300 a year—less than 10 a week. Such families couldn't be expected for much to provide a healthy future. Many families had to go on relief.

How thousands of these low-income farm families won their way to better food and better health and a role in defense of their country is a new chapter in the story of American agriculture.

Many of them had never heard of a "nutrition—wouldn't have understood what it meant if they had. Most of them had never tasted food for them-



selves, but depended on income from a single cash crop to buy it. Few had enough cows, hogs or chickens to furnish their own milk, meat and eggs. They had little or no time to spare for gardens.

One-crop farming was a risky business at best. When surpluses piled up and prices went down, many farmers kept on raising wheat or corn or cotton or tobacco year after year because they didn't know how to raise anything else. Year after year the land became poorer, yielded fewer crops and less money. Less money meant less food.

In 1934, the U. S. Department of Agriculture had to give many farmers a lift. Loans were made for feed and seed. Grants of food and clothing relieved acute suffering. But these were only stopgap aids. Before they could make a living, many farm families had to have livestock and equipment to run their farms. They needed to learn better methods of farming and home management.

A formula was devised to fit the need--credit for those who couldn't get credit anywhere else, plus guidance in sound farm and home practices.

To carry out this program, the Farm Security Administration set up an office in nearly every agricultural county in the country. This was the place where the farmer and his wife could come to talk over their problems. Here they found a farm supervisor and a home management supervisor who understood the problems and talked the language of rural people.

These supervisors go out to the farms and into the homes of FSA borrowers. Every year they help the farmer and his wife figure out how much food the family will need for healthful meals three times a day, every day in the year. A Bureau of Home Economics standard is used as a guide.

Carefully listed are the milk, butter, eggs, meat, lard, vegetables, fruits, flour, cereal--foods that can be produced on the farm; and sugar, coffee, spices and other things that must be bought, including cod liver oil for those who need it.

The food budget completed, the next step is to decide how much food can be produced and how many cows, hogs, chickens, and how large a garden will be needed to do it. Money is included in an FSA loan to buy necessary livestock and farm and garden equipment.

All this production outline is written into a farm and home plan, along with other details of the year's projected operations. Often the plans are worked out at meetings where small groups of farmers and their wives can discuss their problems together.



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In 1934, the U. S. Department of Agriculture had to give away \$100,000,000  
in relief loans to help farmers pay for food and seeds. Grants of food and clothing  
followed as well. But there were only so many ways to help. The farmers  
could not raise a living, many farms failed and so have livestock and crops  
went to the stock market. They needed to learn better methods of farming  
and how to manage.

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These supervisors go out to the farms and into the homes of 1934  
farmers. Every year they help the farmer and his wife figure out how  
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All this production advice is written into a book and goes to the  
farm with other details of the year's projected production. From the  
plans are worked out all the things that must be bought and their  
costs are shown. Their problems solved.



### Gardens for Farmers

Many of these families had never raised gardens, or canned food. They had been living mostly on meal and molasses or sow belly and corn. Now the best piece of land on the place is used for the garden, irrigated if necessary, and systematically planted to keep fresh vegetables growing from early spring to late fall. When one crop is gone, another usually is coming into harvest.

Most families who came to the Farm Security Administration for help were tenants--never sure of staying on one place long enough to get the benefit of the time and money it takes to irrigate and fertilize gardens.

FSA supervisors told these people about subirrigated frame gardens which could be taken apart and moved. The frames, made of scrap lumber or logs, and covered with muslin, protect the garden from wind, heat, and frost. Even in the dryland Great Plains area, farm families can raise year-round supplies of fresh vegetables in these gardens.

### Canning for Proper Nutrition

Families who can't grow fresh vegetables and fruits all year, try every summer to can at least 50 quarts of food for every member of the family--400 quarts for a family of five.

With pressure cookers, it is possible to can foods which couldn't be canned safely by any other method--meat, fish, and such vegetables as peas, green beans and corn. For that reason, FSA loans often include money for cookers, as well as jars, lids and other canning equipment. In 1940, more than 70,000 pressure cookers were put in low-income farm homes, and in 1941 there will be at least that many more new pressure cooker owners.

The home management supervisor shows the farm wife how to use the pressure cooker, and, if necessary, how to churn butter, render lard, make cheese, bake bread, and cook foods to retain flavor and food values. Every penny saved releases more money for other necessities that can't be grown on the farm.

In 1940, FSA borrowers produced an average of \$264 worth of food and other products for their own use, compared with \$163 in the year before they asked for FSA help. Whereas they canned only 139 quarts of fruits and vegetables before, last year they canned 266 quarts.

Many home management supervisors work out original ideas to put across the message of better nutrition. For example, one day 150 farm wives in a Western wheat county found an attractive cellophane sack in their mail. The sack was filled with cracked whole-wheat grain. The home management supervisor had sent it, had attached a note explaining that whole grains had more food value than milled grains, and included a recipe for preparing whole-wheat cereal.



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Another home supervisor experimented with syrup from the sugar beets grown abundantly in the area. When she had worked out a combination for the right consistency and flavor, she taught the women in her county how to make it.

In counties where soybeans were grown but, being new, were not yet used for food, home management supervisors held meetings to show how to cook the beans, how to use them in sandwich spreads, cakes, nut breads, and other foods.

### Food Storage

With increased food production on farms all over the country, storage spaces had to be enlarged, or new ones provided. Farm families built these of adobe blocks, logs, railroad ties, scrap lumber, native stone, or whatever could be obtained and used. Some dug caves in the side of a hill, or dug pits, or buried root vegetables in sand.

Where frozen-food lockers are available, some FSA borrowers rent space to store fresh meat, and in a few southern areas, the Farm Security Administration has made cooperative loans to groups of farmers for joint purchase and use of food lockers.

Cooperative loans also have been made to groups of farm families in counties where fruits can't be grown, or where gardens have failed. These loans have enabled families to get the food they needed, and at the same time to save money by buying in large quantities. Similar cooperatives have been formed for the purchase of garden and field seed, and to buy pressure cookers and other canning equipment.

### Better Health

After eating enough of the right kind of food for a while, many low-income farm people began to "feel better." In the spring of 1941, a physician, after examining a cross-section of families of FSA borrowers in Southeast Missouri, reported: "It is interesting to note the close correlation between anemia and the length of time these families have been on the FSA program. Almost all persons with a hemoglobin percentage below 80 had been on the program for a relatively short time. There was little anemia among families who had been on the program for two years or more."

### Low Incomes Take Toll

But living on low incomes and poor food year after year had taken its toll in health. In 22 typical counties of 17 States, thorough physical examinations were given in 1940 to FSA borrowers and their families--11,497 people. An average of more than  $3\frac{1}{2}$  defects was found in every man, woman and child. Poor teeth was the most prevalent defect.



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The people examined had accumulated physical ailments over a period of years. They didn't have money to pay a doctor, so they didn't call one unless somebody was seriously ill. Then, the farmer either had to let the bill go unpaid, or else sell a cow or some essential equipment to pay it.

In 1936--soon after supervisors began to report that poor health was keeping many farm families from doing a good day's work--the Farm Security Administration worked with State and local medical societies to get medical attention for people on the FSA program at a price they could pay. Today this is one of the biggest voluntary group medical care programs anywhere in the world. It serves half a million men, women and children--more than 100,000 families--in about 900 counties in 35 States.

#### Striking at the Basic Problem

The National Nutrition Conference, recommending vigorous and continued attack on the problems of insecure employment and low incomes, reported: "It has been abundantly proved in many cases that under-nourishment and ignorance are twins born of the same mother--poverty."

Since 1934, FSA borrowers have been helped to get at the root of their financial troubles. Some of them had to get more land, or better land. Many farmers had accumulated debts they couldn't pay. Debt adjustment committees were set up to help them work out voluntary adjustments with their creditors, by scaling down the debts, reducing interest rates or extending the payment periods.

Many varieties of assistance are available. Tenants are helped to get long-term written leases so they can carry out farm plans and improve their living conditions. Instead of single cash crops, FSA borrowers are urged to raise as many different crops as possible. If one crop fails, they still have a chance to make money from another. Supervisors give advice in planting, rotation and other practices to build and maintain soil fertility. Thousands of farmers now have the benefit of modern heavy machinery and well-bred sires they couldn't otherwise afford, by FSA loans for group purchase and use.

Up to March 31, 1941, nearly 900,000 families had received rehabilitation help. Those on the program in 1940 earned an average net income of \$650 compared with \$480 in the year before they asked for FSA assistance, an increase of 35 percent.

Efforts are being pushed not only to stabilize further and to increase incomes of families on the program, but to extend aid to 650,000 other families who are eligible and in need of FSA assistance.

In all its work, the Farm Security Administration uses every available channel of getting better food and practical knowledge to handicapped farm families.







In FSA migratory labor camps, there are pre-school nurseries where children are fed milk and fruit juice during the day, a hot lunch at noon, and cod liver oil every day. Sometimes the food is provided by the Surplus Marketing Administration, sometimes by donations from people in nearby communities and church organizations, sometimes by agricultural workers' health and medical associations.

Similar nurseries are conducted on about 15 homestead projects. When they can, mothers attend with their children, where they get practical experience in child care and feeding. Special training courses have been provided for out-of-school girls as well as the mothers. Supervised by WPA, NYA, or Extension Service leaders, or by FSA home supervisors, the women learn how to conserve food by approved methods, and to prepare well-balanced, well-cooked meals from home-produced or inexpensive foods.

WPA workers have helped FSA supervisors put hot school-lunch programs in many homestead project schools and other rural schools throughout the country. Families who can't spare cash for their children's lunches, do produce and conserve additional food, which they supply instead. On some projects, the children raise gardens on the school grounds, and their mothers can or store the vegetables for school lunches.

Boys and girls are encouraged to study vocational agriculture and vocational home economics at school. Many have had FSA loans to enable them to join 4-H clubs and take part in such projects as gardening, canning, food preparation, and livestock production.

#### Practical Textbooks

A program to educate the parents at home through the children at school was tried out in Coffee County, Alabama.

In 1935 this county was one of the Nation's problem areas. The land was poor. The people were poor. Disease and illiteracy held them back.

When a program to rehabilitate the entire county began, rural workers found children living in homes without tables or chairs or screens, studying textbooks which had no relation to their problems and lives. Children who didn't know the primary lesson of good health and food habits were working out problems in algebra.

FSA supervisors went to the school teachers, told them about conditions found in the homes, and submitted a list of questions that would answer some of the problems. Other rural workers were asked to supply information on methods of conserving the soil and protecting the forests.

New problems and answers were compiled and published in "The Family Life Reader" and "The Family Life Arithmetic," and thousands of copies have since been sold to educators all over the country.



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Similar nurseries are conducted on about 15 hundred projects. When they are, mothers attend with their children, where they get practical experience in child care and feeding. Special feeding courses have been provided for out-of-school girls as well as the mothers. Supervised by WPA, WPA, or Extension Service leaders, or by WPA home economists, the women learn how to conserve food by proper methods, and to prepare well-balanced, well-colored meals from home-produced or inexpensive foods.

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Instead of learning that two plus three equals five, children in Coffee County now learn:

"MARY DRINKS TWO PINTS OF MILK EACH DAY. JOHN DRINKS THREE PINTS EACH DAY. HOW MANY PINTS DO THEY BOTH DRINK?"

They go home after school and tell their parents about a hen that was fed on corn alone and laid only 72 eggs in a year, but another hen fed equal parts of corn and laying mash laid 174 eggs in a year.

"Mother watches our health," the children read in "The Family Life Reader." "She feeds us good food. Our family drinks milk every day. Mother cooks green vegetables every day. We eat fresh fruit and vegetables in the summertime. Mother uses her canned food in the wintertime. She canned 150 quarts of tomatoes this year....All of these foods come from our farm."

By studying their lessons in reading and arithmetic, these children learn how to protect the soil, how to build tables and chairs, how to care for livestock. They learn good farm and home practices, good health and living habits that are useful in their everyday lives.

In one class, the children insisted on staying after school to learn "arithmetic" because "the supervisor is coming over to help us make up farm and home plans tonight."

In evening adult education classes, parents study the same books, and the entire family learns and works together toward the same goal.

#### Food for Defense and Health

The Farm Security Administration, in fact, the entire Department of Agriculture, is energetically driving at two food goals. One is to fill the defense food needs of the United States and of Britain. The other is to get enough vitamins into circulation among Americans to make them a Nation of healthy people. Secretary Wickard wants the United States to eat its way to national health.

Says he, "What America needs is enough to eat."

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